

Housing, 1999

Knowing about the quality of housing in the United States is essential to understanding the quality of life in this country.

The structures people live in are as diverse as their occupants are. Since 1973, the Census Bureau has used the American Housing Survey (AHS)¹ to gather information on occupancy, housing costs, fuel usage, water quality, repairs and improvements, and many other housing related topics. This information helps determine the number of people who live in inadequate housing and how many may need housing assistance.

More than three out of every four housing units in the United States were located in metropolitan areas² in 1999.

Almost half (46 percent) of the country's 115 million total housing units were located in the suburban parts of metropolitan areas, according to the 1999 American Housing Survey (AHS). Another 30 percent of housing units were located in central cities, the large incorporated areas within metropolitan areas. The remaining 24 percent were located outside of metropolitan areas.

Forty-three percent of housing units in central cities were multifamily, compared with 20 percent of the housing units in suburban areas and 12 percent in nonmetropolitan areas. Mobile homes were the most common in nonmetropolitan areas — accounting for 16 percent of all housing units. In metropolitan areas, mobile homes accounted for 7 percent of the housing in the suburbs and only 1 percent in central cities.

¹ The Census Bureau also collects data on housing through its Housing Vacancy Survey, a quarterly supplement to the Current Population Survey.

² For information on metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, central cities, and suburbs, see Chapter 2.

Housing in suburban and nonmetropolitan areas was more likely than housing in central cities to be newly constructed (built in the 4 years prior to the 1999 AHS). Only 3 percent of the housing units in the central cities were newly constructed, compared with about 7 percent of the housing units in the suburbs and nonmetropolitan areas.³

Half of all housing units in central cities were built in 1959 or before. The median year of construction for housing in nonmetropolitan areas was 1970. And about half of all housing units in the suburbs were built in 1973 or later.

In 1999, 92 percent of the country's 112 million year-round housing units were occupied.

Recent homeownership rates are among the highest the Census Bureau has ever measured. At the beginning of the 20th century, fewer than half of all householders were homeowners, according to the 1900 Census. However, every census since 1950 has counted more homeowners than renters. The American dream of homeownership was a reality for two-thirds of householders in 1999, according to the AHS.

Ownership rates were highest in the suburbs and nonmetropolitan areas, 74 and 75 percent, respectively. In central cities, only about half of year-round occupied housing units were owner-occupied.

Eighty-two percent of homeowners lived in detached single-unit housing, according to AHS, and another 5 percent lived in attached single-unit housing, such as townhouses. Eight percent lived in mobile homes. The remainder lived in various types of multiunit housing.

Renters also lived in a variety of housing types. One-third of renters occupied single-unit attached and

³The percentage of newly constructed housing units is not statistically different in suburban and nonmetropolitan areas.

Words That Count

- **A housing unit** is a house, apartment, group of rooms, or single room occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live and eat separately from any other people in the building and which have direct access from the outside of the building or through a common hallway.

- **Occupied units** are those occupied by at least one person who usually lives in the unit. By definition, the count of occupied housing units is the same as the count of households.

- **Year-round housing units** include all occupied and vacant units, regardless of design, that are intended for occupancy at all times of the year.

- **A single family detached unit** is a single-unit housing structure with open space on all four sides.

- **A single family attached unit** is a single-unit housing structure that has one or more unbroken walls extending from ground to roof separating it from adjoining structures, such as a townhouse.

- **Multifamily units** are housing units contained in multiunit structures, such as apartment buildings.

- **Monthly housing costs for owner-occupied units** include monthly payments for all mortgages or installment loans or contracts, except reverse annuity mortgages and home equity lines of credit. Costs also include real estate taxes (including taxes on mobile homes and mobile home sites if the site is owned), property insurance, homeowner's association fees, cooperative or

condominium fees, mobile home park fees, land rent, and utility costs. Costs do not include maintenance and repairs.

- **Monthly housing costs for renter-occupied housing units** include the contract rent, utilities, property insurance, and mobile home park fees. Renter housing units occupied without payment of cash rent are shown separately as no cash rent. For rental units subsidized by a housing authority, the federal government, or state or local governments, the monthly rental costs reflect only the portion paid by the household and not the portion subsidized. The figures do not adjust for lost security deposits, or the benefit of free months' rent offered by some owners.

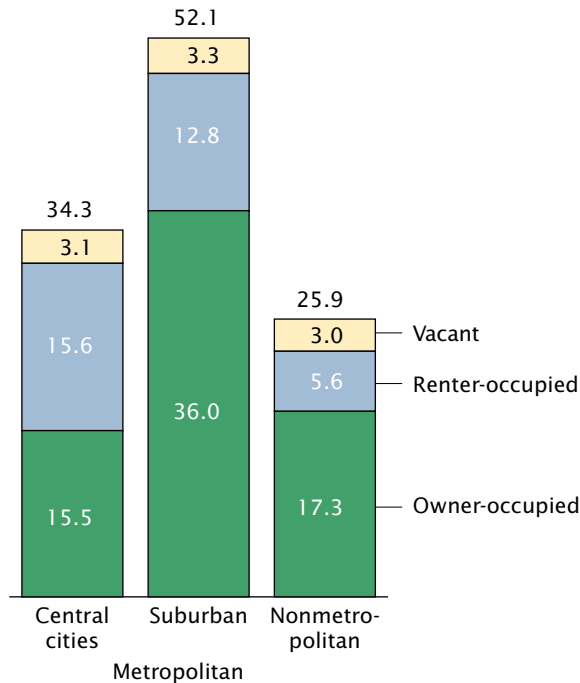
- **Housing with severe physical problems** has at least one of the following:

(1) Lacking hot or cold piped water or flush toilet or lacking both tub and shower for the exclusive use of occupants; (2) Having been uncomfortably cold last winter for 24 hours or more because heating equipment broke down at least three times for at least 6 hours each time; (3) Having no electricity, or all of the three electric problems: exposed wiring, a room with no working wall outlet, or three blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers in the last 90 days; (4) In public areas, having no working light fixtures, loose or missing steps, loose or missing railings, and for buildings with 3 or more floors, no working elevator; or (5) Having any five of the following six maintenance problems: water leaks from outside, inside leaks from pipes or plumbing fixtures, holes in the floors, holes or cracks in the walls or ceilings, more than 88 square inches of peeling paint or broken plaster, or signs of rats in the last 90 days.

Figure 7-1.
Total Year-Round Housing Units by
Tenure and Metropolitan Status: 1999

(Total year-round, housing units = 112.3 million)

Millions of units



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1999 American Housing Survey.

detached housing. Another one-third lived in multifamily units with fewer than 10 units in the structure.⁴ Of the remainder, most lived in larger multifamily structures. However, 3 percent rented mobile homes.

The median monthly cost of housing was \$581 for homeowners and \$580 for cash renters.⁵ However, owner costs more than renter costs tended toward extremes. While 27 percent of owners had monthly costs of less than \$300, only 12 percent of cash renters did. And even though 26 percent of owners had costs of \$1,000 or more, only 10 percent of cash renters did.

Housing conditions vary for different population groups.

Asian and Pacific Islanders, Blacks, and Hispanics⁶ were more likely than White non-Hispanics to live in rental housing, according to the 1999 AHS. About 51 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander householders, 46 percent of Black householders, and 45 percent of Hispanic householders were homeowners, compared with 74 percent of White non-Hispanic householders.⁷

⁴There is no statistical difference between the percentage of renters living in single family attached and detached structures and the percentage living in multifamily structures with fewer than 10 units.

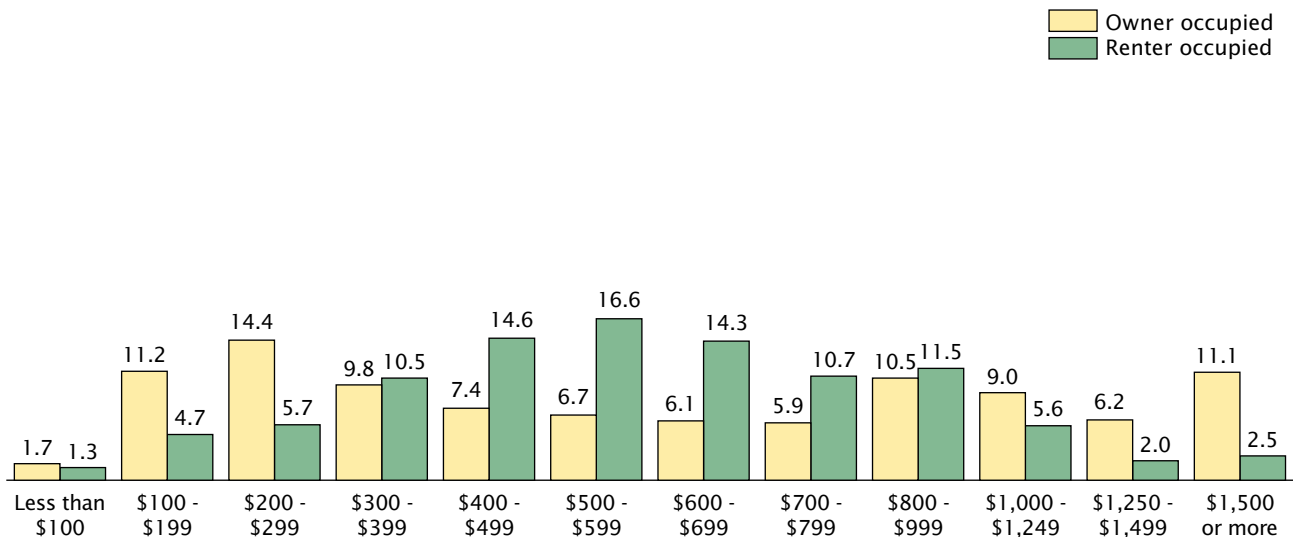
⁵There is no statistical difference between the median monthly costs for homeowners and cash renters.

⁶Hispanics may be of any race.

⁷There is no statistical difference between the percentage of Black and Hispanic householders who are homeowners.

Figure 7-2.
Monthly Housing Costs by Tenure: 1999

(Percent distribution)



Note: This chart excludes "no cash rent."

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1999 American Housing Survey.

Overall, 2.0 percent of occupied housing units had severe physical problems with plumbing, heating, electricity, public areas, or maintenance. The share of householders living in housing with severe problems was 1.5 percent among White non-Hispanic householders and 1.7 percent among Asian and Pacific Islander householders. About 3.4 percent of Black householders and 3.8 percent of Hispanic householders lived in housing units that could be classified as having severe problems.⁸

The proportion of householders living in newly constructed housing also varied by race and ethnicity. About 6 percent of both White non-Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander householders lived in housing that was built in the 4 years prior to the survey, compared with 5 percent of Black householders and 4 percent of Hispanic householders.⁹

In 1999, one in five householders was aged 65 or older.

The Census Bureau collects information on housing that can help identify potential problems for older adults, including lighting in public hallways, availability of cooking and laundry equipment, heating reliability, transportation availability, and neighborhood conditions. Eighty percent of householders aged 65 and

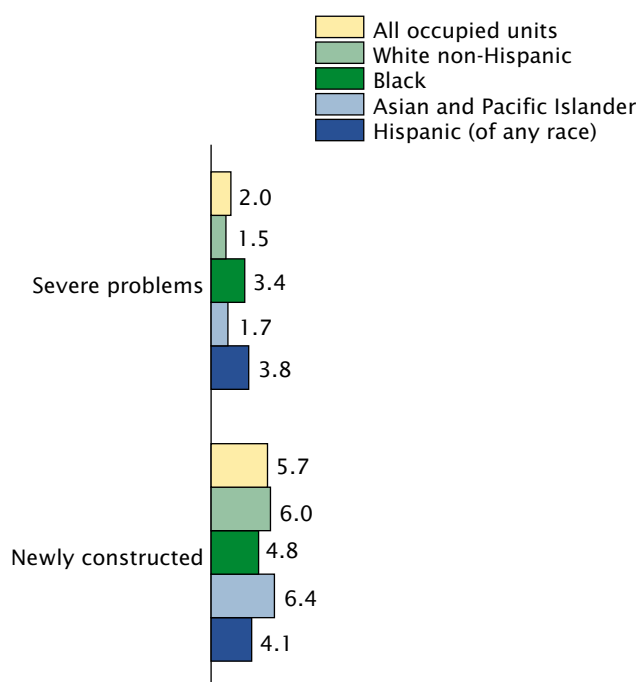
⁸ There is no statistical difference between the percentage of White non-Hispanic householders and Asian and Pacific Islander householders in housing with severe physical problems and there is no statistical difference between the percentage of Black householders and Hispanic householders in housing with severe physical problems.

⁹ There is no statistical difference between the percentage of White non-Hispanic householders and Asian and Pacific Islander householders in newly constructed housing and there is no statistical difference between the percentage of Black householders and Hispanic householders in newly constructed housing.

older owned their own homes in 1999. About 75 percent lived in single-unit detached housing and mobile homes and about 45 percent lived alone.

Figure 7-3.
Characteristics of Occupied Housing Units by Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder: 1999

(Percent of households in group)



Note: Newly constructed units are those built in the four years prior to the 1999 survey.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1999 American Housing Survey.

All householders in the American Housing Survey were asked to rate the structure they lived in from 1 (the worst) to 10 (the best). More than half of elderly householders gave their housing a score of 9 or 10. Only about 6 percent gave their housing a score of 5 or less. About 2 percent of housing occupied by elderly householders could be classified as having severe physical problems.

All householders were also asked to rate the quality of their neighborhoods from 1 (the very worst) to 10 (the very best). Again, more than half of elderly householders gave their neighborhoods a score of 9 or 10. Only 8 percent gave their neighborhoods a score of 5 or less. Ten percent said there was crime in their neighborhoods and 19 percent said that neighborhood shopping was not satisfactory. Seventeen percent of elderly householders had no car, truck, or van available, and 43 percent lived in a neighborhood where there was no public transportation.

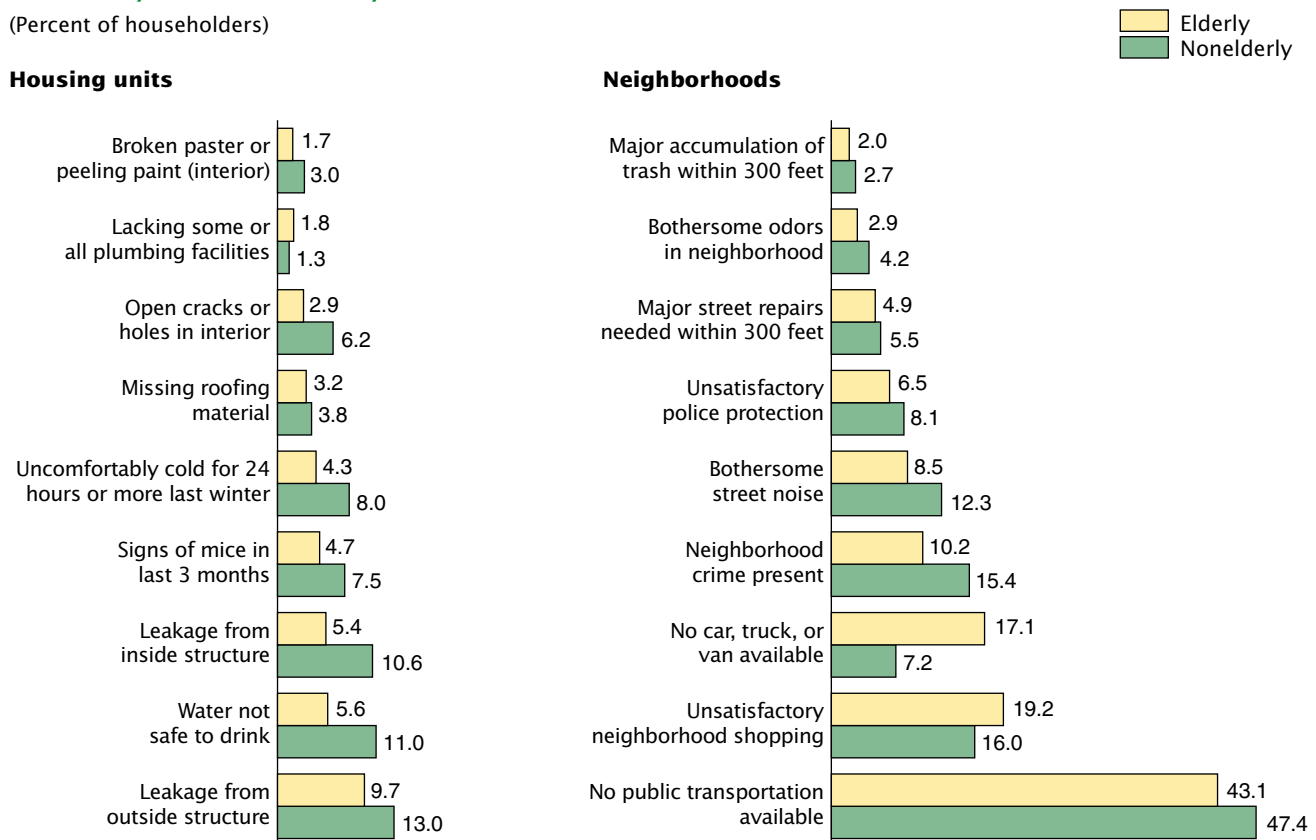
The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Housing Report: *American Housing Survey for the United States: 1999*.
- For complete reports and detailed tables go to the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "H" for "Housing" and then select the American Housing Survey (AHS).
- Contact the Housing and Household Economic Statistics' Statistical Information Office at 301-457-3242 or e-mail hhes-info@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.

Figure 7-4.

Selected Characteristics of Housing Units and Neighborhoods of Elderly and Nonelderly Householders: 1999

(Percent of householders)



Note: Elderly householders are those aged 65 and older.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1999 American Housing Survey.